

Remarks by
Jack Rollison
54th Virginia Transportation Conference
Oct. 25, 2005

Good morning, everyone. And welcome to the panel discussion on "Political and Policy Debate."

I'm Jack Rollison. It is my hope that the speakers here today will help us to think through the different dimensions of our transportation problems. We hope to show you a mix of policy alternatives, along with commentary that will hopefully provoke some stimulating discussion and – ultimately – better transportation policy decisions.

Now before I turn the microphone over to these impressive experts, I want to set the stage by making a few observations about problem as I see it.

I have followed transportation issues for many years -- first as a small businessman, raised in Northern Virginia. Then as a nine term member of the General Assembly, representing Prince William County. And most recently as Special Assistant to the Commissioner at VDOT. From each of these vantage points, I have looked out on the

transportation scene and its impact on everyone in the Commonwealth.

Maybe most of all, I have seen the impact of these issues on our lives as citizens and parents. When – after struggling to get back and forth from work -- people don't have time or energy left to do the things that we want to do for our children and our communities, then something is wrong. And that is the situation we face.

If it seems overwhelming, think back a little.

A few years ago, NBC's news anchor, Tom Brokaw, wrote a fascinating book about another generation of Americans who faced problems that make ours pale by comparison. They grew up in the Depression ... defeated the Nazis in World War II ... fought the Communists in Korea and Vietnam ... put a man on the moon ... raised the largest generation of young Americans in history, the Baby Boomers ... cured polio ... developed television and mass media ... invented the transistor and microprocessors ... built cars and skyscrapers ... and through it all they somehow found the time, the energy, and the money to develop the most

remarkable transportation system any nation ever enjoyed, including the interstate highway system and the aviation industry.

Ours is the world we inherited from them. Admittedly, all is not well, at least not in the transportation arena:

- The passenger rail system that once linked our coasts and inspired countless ballads and songs is a failure, though we pretend not to notice. Our freight rail carriers are little better off, but they have a difficult time maintaining their own tracks.
- The airlines that were built up in our parents' day are slipping into bankruptcy – even as we happily line up to get cheaper and cheaper airline tickets.
- On the ground, the roads and bridges that the Greatest Generation built are sagging under the weight of our growing prosperity. We push the design of our roads to the limit and beyond. We have overloaded the highways with more and more

cars and with heavier trucks that are tearing up the roads.

- And the state fuel taxes we pay don't even cover the basic maintenance on 60,000 miles of roads. Here in Virginia, we try to keep up the third-largest state-constructed- and state-maintained road system in the nation on the 41st lowest state gas tax. It doesn't really matter that our highway construction projects are being built on time and within budget, if the number of projects keeps dropping by a third each year.

Happily, there are things that we can do: First of all, we can pick up the tools that our fathers and mothers put down when they retired. We can start by building new roads and bridges in the congested areas of the state where they are needed most. We can partner with private companies and with local governments to create new lane miles where the traffic is heaviest. And we can start with toll roads built under the PPTA laws.

Smart growth and smart development should also mean common sense growth and development. Who better than local governments to manage local subdivision roads? We should give incentives to local governments to take over the management and maintenance of local subdivision roads – the way virtually every other state does now. Local government revenues have increased as much as 16% a year because of the increasing value of taxable real estate. And yet the Virginia state road system is expected to accept and maintain another 200 miles of local subdivision roads every year. This can't continue indefinitely.

Smart growth and local control of subdivision roads should not mean local veto power over important state and regional roads. Regional transportation authorities can be used more effectively to localize road and transit decisions and, yes, to create local funds to turn those decisions into reality. Any long term plans should be approved by the voters.

And whatever we decide, all transportation funds – whether local, state, or federal – should be protected from raids and from redirection. Citizens need to know that their

tax money will be spent where and how it was proposed. Any debt should follow constitutional requirements to be approved by the citizens for precise projects and exact amounts.

There is nothing magical in this. These are common sense solutions to problems which are largely the result of an abundance of prosperity. Everyone should be so fortunate.

It is up to us to make our own future. And we don't have far to look to find a good example. The Greatest Generation has pointed the way. We only need to emulate their confident, "can do" attitude, make the decisions we need to make, roll up our sleeves, and get the job done.

Those are my thoughts, in any case. I am an optimist. I just hope I haven't stolen the thunder of anyone on our distinguished panel!

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Our first speaker is Dr. Robert Atkinson. He is representing the Progressive Policy Institute and will talk about "*The Politics of Gridlock*." Dr. Atkinson

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The next speaker is James Bacon – also known as "the Rebellious Bacon." Mr. Bacon is a straightforward observer of government and publishes – appropriately enough -- *Bacon's Rebellion*. He will speak on "*The Loyal Opposition*." Mr. Bacon

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Our next speaker is Dr. Robert Holsworth. He is a regular observer and commentator on Virginia politics. His topic is appropriately titled, "*A Review of Politics in Transportation*." Dr. Holsworth

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Our final panelist is Dr. William Shobe. He is an expert in understanding how local governments work and comes to

us from Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. He will speak on "*The View of Local Governments in Addressing Transportation Issues*." Dr. Shobe